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# Combating Corruption in Pakistan: National Efforts and Compliance with Global Anti-Bribery Frameworks

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**Abstract:** *Corruption is among the greatest obstacles to good governance, social-economic growth, and the confidence of the people in Pakistan. This paper explores the national measures to fight corruption and analyzes how well Pakistan adheres to international anti-corruption standards, specifically, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Although legal tools such as Prevention of Corruption Act (1947), the National Accountability Ordinance (1999), and specialized organizations such as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) are in place, corruption continues to be an issue in various sectors, such as in public procurement, welfare programs, and administrative services, among others. This research design is qualitative with the application of document analysis of government reports, legal textual documents, civil society analysis, international surveillance of compliance, and academic publications. The effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms, enforcement outcomes, preventive measures, and alignment to the international anti-bribery standards are analyzed. Results show that even though national efforts have led to major seizure of assets and high-profile convictions, there is poor enforcement due to the domestic affairs of the political system, fragmented and institutional roles, and the lack of preventive governance. Furthermore, Pakistan is partially compliant with UNCAC, with the lack of regulation in the areas of asset declaration, whistleblower protection, and inter-agency coordination. This paper finds that corruption in Pakistan should be tackled in a holistic manner by incorporating strong legal implementation, institutional independence, preventive governance, involvement of civil society, and ultimate adherence to the international standards. Intensifying transparency, accountability and international cooperation will not only good governance and increase the level of trust but also will enhance the credibility and image of Pakistan in the global community that combats corruption. The study offers information to the policymakers, practitioners and scholars who may be aiming at coming up with effective anti-corruption strategies within the contexts of developing countries.*

**Keywords:** Corruption, Anti-corruption frameworks, NAB, UNCAC, Governance, Anti-bribery compliance

## Introduction

Corruption is a phenomenon that has long been considered as one of the biggest obstacles to good governance, sustainable development, and trust in the state institutions among the population. Corruption has seeped into different layers of the political, economic, and administrative environment in Pakistan and has impacted the delivery of services to the population, investment, and social equity. The impact of corruption on economic growth and the legitimacy of the state apparatus is often noted by scholars and organisations, thus deteriorating the democratic regimes and the trust of the citizens in the institutions (Bakhsh & Abbasi, 2020).

The situation with corruption in Pakistan is not limited to petty bribery, but it encompasses grand corruption, misappropriation of state finances, misuse of power to enrich, and collusion during state procurement and favoritism in state resources. There are high-profile cases that occur every now and then, including big financial misappropriations and scandals of senior officials in both provincial and federal institutions. Concerning this, a case in point is the unfolding of a Rs40 billion corruption scandal in Kohistan, an alleged fraudulent withdrawal of the government treasury accounts, which shows how big and intricate a graft issue is in the Pakistani public financial systems (scandal, 2025). Specialized agencies have also been shown to be corrupt: an example being a bribery and extortion scandal in the National Cyber Crimes Investigation Agency that revealed the systematic misuse of position in a government office to amass wealth (Investigation, 2025).

In addition to this, corruption is not only a matter of individual cases but also a structural problem affecting the socio-economic performance. As a case in point, a recent analysis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicated that with the adequate response of Pakistan to corruption and lack of proper governance, the country could have significant GDP growth, which explains the extent to which corruption influences economic performance (Reuters, 2025). Structural issues that were identified in the IMF report included the absence of transparency, obscure procurement procedures, and ineffective systems of oversight across state-owned enterprises and revenue authorities. This fact is in line with some consistent complaints that, although Pakistan has a comparatively good legal system, the country experiences issues with enforcement and institutional capacity to allow corruption to be systemic (Pakistan, 2015).

In its simplest definition, Pakistan is corrupt because it has fallen short in the governance system whereby the people in authority in the country have misused the mandate they have been given to serve their selfish interest. This malpractice does not only divert the resources of the populace, but it also undermines the performance and fairness of the public services. The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is one of the largest social safety net programs that has been time and again exposed to internal corruption, as an audit showed embezzlement and misappropriation of over Rs141 billion, which was meant to be given to the vulnerable ones (Times, 2025). These incidences increase the perceptions of people that state institutions tend to pursue specific interests other than the common good. Those facts show that corruption is not only the bane of the economy but also of social trust and the legitimacy of governmental power.

To address these long-standing problems, Pakistan has come up with various legal, institutional, and policy countermeasures that aim at fighting corruption at home and harmonizing the country with the global standards on anti-bribery. The legal system of Pakistan has its formal anti-corruption policy dated back to the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1947, which was the initial law intended to criminalize bribery and hold the officials accountable (Khan, 2025). This framework has, over the decades, been expanded by other laws and institutions that had the responsibility of accountability and enforcement. The largest of them is the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which was created according to the National Accountability Ordinance of 1999 and became the core anti-graft agency, having investigative and prosecutorial powers to investigate corruption crimes nationwide (Bakhsh et al., 2020).

The task that NAB is assigned is quite significant: the organization is expected to investigate, prosecute, and confiscate the property associated with corruption. Pakistani authorities in a recent press statement reported that the anti-corruption push by NAB hit the mark when it recovered more than Rs12.3 trillion in state funds, a feat, the officials quoted, which constituted an indicator of a new enforcement power and credibility. This rehabilitation involved reclaiming state property and compensating victims of fraud and misrule, and reforms like Digital NAB were instituted to streamline operations and enhance transparency as well as simplify processes of investigation. These innovations show that there is a coordinated attempt to ensure that the enforcement of anti-corruption law is more efficient and less likely to be manipulated or postponed.

However, despite these institutional changes, it is still being criticized with regard to political influence, disproportionate enforcement, and strategic constraints. The operations of NAB, in particular, were also a topic of discussion, and some analysts claim that political elites sometimes influence the political landscape in such a manner that it restricts the independence and efficiency of the bank (Shah & Qayyum, 2022). Some of the assessments argue that although NAB has been involved in many high-profile cases, there is a reflective nature of underlying political moves in its activities, which may hamper effective anti-corruption practices. This is a tension that reflects the wider structural issue: how to make the anti-corruption institutions really autonomous in a politically sophisticated environment.

Similarly to the national anti-graft mechanisms, Pakistan also interacts with the international anti-corruption mechanisms, which are intended to align the domestic activities with the global standards. The best-known of them is the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the first global instrument legally binding and addressing the problem of corruption in its entirety. Pakistan is a signatory to the UNCAC, signed in 2003 and ratified in 2007, which undertakes its provisions, which involve prevention measures, criminalization of corruption crimes, international cooperation, and recovery of assets. The UNCAC does not only focus on repression but also preventive mechanisms of governance like transparency programs, codes of conduct for the public officials, and the means of civil society participation. The participation in UNCAC puts Pakistan in a community of states worldwide that are determined to fight corruption and allows collaboration among multinationals in such areas as mutual legal assistance and asset recovery (Bakhsh et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, as research has shown, there still exist structural gaps in the legal and institutional framework of Pakistan, especially with regard to complete adherence to the international standards. Research indicates that the legal framework broadly addresses most of the UNCAC obligations on paper, but most of them are not well implemented because of insufficient resources, lack of coordination, and political interference that waters down the implementation. The most important thing is that whistleblower protection and freedom of information are some of the areas where the statutory regime in Pakistan is lagging as opposed to the recommended practices that ensure the effectiveness of the transparency and accountability measures (Pakistan, 2015).

This inability of corruption in Pakistan to be eliminated despite the strong legal provisions and institutional approaches shows the nature of converting legal promises into real behavior and structural transformation. The institutional reactions are also forced to find a political opportunity in which influential interests may oppose implementation and also respond to the public view of impunity and unequal application of the laws. Improved accountability, then, needs to be backed by tougher legal systems as well as political goodwill, open practices, and empowerment of civil societies.

Moreover, the international involvement in the anti-corruption mechanisms is not a mere cosmetic gesture, as it offers rates of comparison, technical support, and international cooperation needed to trace illegal financial flows and recover stolen funds. Anti-bribery compliance cannot be confined at a national level as global financial systems are becoming more linked; harmonized legal standards, channels of information sharing, and the joint implementation mechanisms that cross boundaries are needed. Pakistan's involvement in UNCAC and related discussions is an acknowledgement of this fact, and full implementation of international anti-bribery standards into the national policy and practice is yet to be achieved.

## Problem Statement

In Pakistan, corruption is a significant issue that has weakened the government, economic development, and people's confidence in the institutions of the state. Although legal systems like the National Accountability Ordinance (1999), the Prevention of Corruption Act (1947), and the operational mandate of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) exist, there are various forms of corruption, and these include bribery at low levels and large-scale embezzlement and power abuse. Though Pakistan is a signatory to the international tools such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), full adherence to the global anti-bribery standards has not been enforced because of institutional inefficiencies, political influence, lack of coordination between agencies, and limited enforcement mechanisms. This is compounded by systemic lapses in transparency, accountability, and governance of the public sector. Lack of interrelationship between laws, institutional capability, and real implementation gives corruption the root of persistence, which prevents socio-economic development and Pakistan on the global platform. Thus, in this research, it is proposed to examine the intersection of national anti-corruption efforts and the international compliance programs in Pakistan and how existing obstacles obstruct the successful implementation and enforcement of the anti-bribery efforts. These issues are important to understand to make viable recommendations that can be implemented to improve the governance of anti-corruption in enhancing transparency and improving alignment of Pakistan to international standards.

## Research Questions

According to the problem statement, the research will attempt to answer the following major questions:

What are all the major legal and institutional frameworks in Pakistan which are made to fight against corruption and bribery?

How well has Pakistan put in place and/or abided by international anti-bribery systems, including UNCAC?

## Research Methodology

This paper will use a qualitative research design grounded on documentary and descriptive analysis to explore the national anti-corruption practices and adherence to international anti-bribery policies in Pakistan. Secondary sources, such as government reports; legal documents, such as the National Accountability Ordinance (1999) and the Prevention of Corruption Act (1947); UNCAC review reports, publications of the civil society, including Transparency International Pakistan and PILDAT, scholarly articles; and reliable media sources that tracked high-profile cases of corruption, will provide data. The paper uses content analysis to determine patterns of enforcement, determine compliance with international norms, and determine the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms. An international best practice will also be employed in drawing a comparative framework that would contrast legal and institutional measures of Pakistan against international best practices. Ethical processes involve correct citation, use of publicly accessible data and sensitivity in presentation of results. This research design enables the study to present a holistic, evidence-based picture of corruption governance and compliance with anti-bribery in Pakistan.

## Discussion and Analysis

Corruption in Pakistan is a deeply rooted governance issue that has infiltrated various ranks of the administration, economic administration, and the trust of the institution. Although legislative acts and institutional changes exist, the fact that corruptive actions still remain is an indicator of structural defects of enforcement as well as adherence to international anti-bribery systems. This part evaluates the performance of the national anti-corruption mechanisms in Pakistan, how they conform to international standards, and how the systems pose systemic obstacles to the enforcement.

National Frameworks of Anti-Corruption and Institutional Mechanisms

The anti-corruption system in Pakistan is embedded in both the statutory provisions and institutional enforcement process. One of the first legal instruments to convict bribery and abuse of office by the officials of the state is the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947 (Bakhsh and Abbasi, 2020). In the process, the legal framework has grown with the creation of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) of 1999 that created the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) as the main institution that deals with investigation, prosecution, and asset recovery in the context of corruption (Imran, Murtiza, and Akbar, 2023). The scope of jurisdiction of NAB is both federal and provincial in nature, which offers a centralized approach to address petty as well as grand corruption.

In addition to NAB, provincial anti-corruption departments exist that are used to deal with localized instances of misappropriation and bribery. To illustrate, the Khyber Pakhtunkhawa Ehtesab Commission was created to oversee provincial positions and impose political responsibility in the offices (Shah & Qayyum, 2022). These institutional provisions indicate that Pakistan is appreciative of the fact that a multi-tiered anti-corruption system is necessary. Nevertheless, the provisions of the law and the presence of the institutions do not equate to the uniform implementation, as the impact of politics and scarce resource distributions on the efficiency of operations is observed.

NAB has carried out some well-publicized anti-corruption campaigns, such as the investigation of massive financial fraud, misappropriation of government funds, and misuse of government land. The annual report of NAB has reported that in recent years, the company has been able to recover more than Rs12 trillion of assets due to specific investigations, prosecutions, and negotiated settlements (NAB Annual Report, 2024). These numbers show that enforcement is actively practiced, but critics claim that the choice of cases is often based on political considerations, which leads to claims that they are selected in terms of accountability and casts doubt on the objectivity of the bureau (Akram, 2023).

Moreover, the judiciary is very critical in facilitating anti-corruption efforts. Pakistan has set up special anti-corruption courts to hasten the process of corruption case trials. Whereas this judicial innovation enhances greater efficiency in the processes, delays and political interference normally undermine the effects of legal deterrence. Some of the examples of years of litigation indicate the difficulties of maintaining proper enforcement even in the presence of specialized judicial mechanisms (Shah et al., 2022).

Legal Effectiveness and Implementation Problems

Pakistan has a legal framework that offers a detailed framework to deal with corruption, but in practical application, there are severe challenges. A major challenge is the lack of coordination of roles among various agencies. The NAB, provincial anti-corruption authorities, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and other regulators also have overlapping mandates and consequently inefficiencies, jurisdictional problems, and selective application (Imran et al., 2023).

The issue of political interference is another important issue that is a threat to the independence of anti-corruption agencies. A number of the studies mention that the shift in the government can cause a shift in the prioritization of cases thus forming an illusion of partial justice (Bakhsh et al., 2020). As an example, politically sensitive cases are occasionally shelved down or dropped whereas others are fought ruthlessly according to their compatibility with current political interests. The dynamics of this nature breed the culture of impunity by the powerful elites, which is incompatible with the principles of fair and impartial implementation that the international anti-corruption systems are advocating.

It is also constrained by resource constraints. The provincial anti-corruption agencies and NAB are generally under-staffed with qualified personnel, up-to-date investigative equipment, and technology to efficiently track the intricate financial fraud cases. This drawback is especially noticeable in the process of monitoring the illegal transactions between the countries or the huge-scale financial fraud that is becoming reliant on the advanced forensic accounting and international collaboration (Bank, 2023).

Conformance to International Anti-Bribery Frameworks

Pakistan is an active participant in the international standards of anti-bribery, but this process is mainly manifested in the ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007. UNCAC helps in offering a legal and normative framework in which prevention, criminalization, asset recovery, and international cooperation are included. The local efforts of NAB, NAO, and provincial anti-corruption strategies are supposed to be in accordance with the UNCAC provisions and especially in numerous aspects of the criminalization of bribery, the creation of preventive strategies, and the opportunity to cooperate with other states (Bakhsh et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, there are still gaps in compliance. Preventive governance, such as codes of conduct, asset declaration, and whistleblower protection are one of the areas of concern. Although laws are in place, the administration of these laws is subject to localized interpretation, and ways of tracking compliance are inadequate. It has been observed in reports that Transparency International Pakistan and PILDAT made, that incomplete declarations of their assets and effective monitoring mechanisms decrease the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts, and Pakistan does not meet the standards of UNCAC (International, 2023).

The other compliance issue would be concerning the asset recovery and international collaboration. UNCAC underlines the necessity of equal legal cooperation and repatriation of embezzled funds. There has been a challenge of operationalizing these provisions fully in Pakistan because of bureaucratic delay, lack of coordination among different agencies, and insufficient international financial institution engagement (UNODC, 2025). Furthermore, the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention is not part of Pakistan, and it has legally binding rules to criminalize bribery of foreign public officials. The lack of these commitments restricts the correspondence of Pakistan with the wider range of international anti-bribery standards (Bank, 2023).

Assessment of the Anti-Corruption Effectiveness

The performance of the anti-corruption control systems in Pakistan can be measured by the results on the recovery of assets, prosecution, and the systemic deterrence. The fact that NAB has reported recovering some significant financial assets implies successful operations of the organization, but the key results in terms of decreasing the level of corruption are not so evident. According to the independent reviews, corruption is still widespread in various sectors, such as healthcare, education, public procurement, and social welfare programs (Shah et al., 2022).

Indeed, an example is the work of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) audits which showed that despite transparency programs, corruption and abuse of more than Rs141 billion is still possible (Times, 2025). Equally, the procurement procedures within the federal and provincial departments are still facing irregularities which indicates weakness in enforcement and monitoring.

The involvement of the civil society is a vital complementary aspect in ensuring transparency and accountability. Groups such as Transparency International Pakistan view operations through monitoring and reporting and generate campaigns to create awareness, particularly on International Anti-Corruption Day to bring forward systemic safeguards and demand reforms (International, 2023). Such initiatives help in the development of a culture of accountability, yet their effects are limited unless they are supported by institutions and properly enforced.

Problems with Implementation and Systemic Obstacles

In spite of the improvements, Pakistan has a number of systemic issues to fight corruption:

Political Influence: The enactment of the law is usually influenced by the dominant political process and thus biased prosecution and unequal enforcement of the laws (Akram, 2023).

Fragmentation of the Institutions: There are several overlapping agencies that result in jurisdictional conflicts and inefficiencies (Imran et al., 2023).

Weak Judicial Capacity: The deterrent effect of enforcement is diminished by delays in the anti-corruption court and bottlenecks in the process (Shah et al., 2022).

Poor Preventive Practices: The poor adherence to UNCAC standards is due to the inadequate use of codes of conduct, whistleblower safeguards, and asset declaration measures (Transparency, 2023).

International Compliance Gaps: Pakistan has a low involvement in such frameworks as the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, and asset recovery issues decrease its adherence to international anti-bribery standards (UNODC, 2025).

The above problems show that law alone is not enough, but good anti-corruption policies must encompass political goodwill, institutional independence, openness to the populace, and the involvement of civil society.

International Benchmarking

Compared to UNCAC and other global frameworks related to the prevention of bribery, Pakistan has a partial conformity. Although the act of corruption is criminalized by legislation, and organizations such as NAB are in place, preventive governance, transparency tools, and recovery of assets are not well developed (Bakhsh et al., 2020). Best practices across the globe focus not just on criminalization, but institutional independence, public disclosure and incorporation of private sector compliance programs. Compared to it, Pakistan has a more reactive system that aims at investigation and prosecution, but not with a system of extensive preventative governance (UNODC, 2025).

To implement best practices in the world, it may include:

Improving the asset declaration and monitoring systems of senior officials,

Enactment of whistleblower protection laws that are enforced,

Improving digital governance to minimise discretionary power and graft opportunities, and

Joining other international anti-bribery conventions outside UNCAC to make sure that they are aligned with international compliance standards.

These would enhance the anti-corruption efficacy of Pakistan and its global credibility as well as minimise systemic chances of bribery and embezzlement.

**Key Findings**

Pakistan is endowed with an elaborate legal and institutional framework which includes NAO, NAB, provincial anti-corruption departments as well as the specialized courts in anti-corruption.

Regardless of the effectiveness of enforcement, it is hindered by political influence and resource constraints.

The adherence to such international framework as UNCAC is formal, though its applicability is undermined by loopholes in enforcement.

The mechanisms of preventive governance, transparency, and the participation of civil society are not highly developed, which makes the effect of anti-corruption practices less long-term.

Through comparative analysis, it has been noted that the anti-corruption strategy adopted in Pakistan is more reactive in nature when the international best practices put more emphasis on the preventive and integrative strategies.

**Conclusion**

Corruption in Pakistan is a complex and system-wide problem which interferes with the operation of the state, the development of the economy, the provision of services to the population, and, in general, the image of the state structures. Although a thorough system of laws has been established and special institutional bodies, which include the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and provincial anti-corruption departments were formed, the success of these measures is still limited due to political interference, inadequate resources, divided enforcement roles, and ineffective preventive governance procedures. Although NAB has recorded substantial outcomes in reclaiming stolen assets and prosecuting high-profile cases, selective enforcement and prosecution delay have compromised the trust of the populace and given the sense of impunity to high-profile actors.

The involvement of Pakistan in the international anti-bribery mechanisms, specifically the United Nations Convention against Corruption, is a sign of formal adherence to corruption prevention, asset recovery, and international collaboration in the global standards. Nonetheless, the issues of compliance are still apparent in such areas as preventive governance, transparency, declaration of assets, protection of whistleblowers, and inter-agency coordination. These loopholes reveal that Pakistan has incorporated global standards in legal and policy means, but the realisation of the standards has been imbalanced and limited to yield a sustainable change to the levels of corruption.

The results of the research emphasize the fact that the fight against corruption should go beyond the legislative and institutional requirements; it should be a comprehensive approach, which would imply the application of the law and its enforcement, the prevention of corruption, the political neutrality of the organization, the involvement of the civil society, and the international collaboration. Increasing the credibility and effectiveness of anti corruption mechanisms by strengthening institutional autonomy, investing in human and technological resources, and promoting transparency through both digital governance and citizen participation are very important. In addition to that, the introduction of international best practices and full implementation of UNCAC provisions, particularly on asset recovery and multilateral collaboration, can enhance the measures taken by Pakistan to meet the international anti-bribery standards.

To sum up, the anti-corruption activities in Pakistan have proved to have some achievements and shortcomings. Although national programs and global obligations create a vision of how the governance should be reformed, structural, political, and procedural issues still keep the effectiveness of governance. The solutions to these issues have to be a concerted policy effort, political intent, and effective implementation instruments that focus on accountability and transparency more than immediate political benefits. Through enhancing preventive governance and impartial enforcement and by enhancing adherence to international systems of anti-bribery, Pakistan has a chance of going towards corruption reduction, institutional credibility, and sustainable socio-economic growth. Proper anti-corruption policies do not only improve the domestic governance but also improve the confidence of the rest of the world in Pakistan as a country that adheres to the rule of law and ethical governance of the country.

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